

# Annette *Sciberras, RN, BSN*

## Cardiomyopathy Survivor, Age 54, Detroit, MI

One of 11 national spokeswomen for the American Heart Association's 2014 Go Red for Women Campaign, Annette Sciberras is administrative nurse manager of a cardiac unit at Beaumont Hospital, Royal Oak. As a spokeswoman, she testified before the Michigan senate this year on the importance of making more people aware of heart disease, in addition to other engagements for the American Heart Association.

A leader at Beaumont Health System and on the national stage, Annette is making it her goal to remind women that they are important, too, and that they should take care of themselves. Annette's compelling personal story and how she took control of her own heart disease is a prime example of a nurse extending the scope of her work beyond the hospital walls and into the community.

Throughout February, she traveled around parts of the Midwest and educated women on the importance of taking care of themselves, exercising and eating a healthy diet. "This gives

me the opportunity to connect with others and tell them how heart disease is the #1 killer of women—more than all cancers combined," she says. "This is a great opportunity for me as a nurse leader. Heart disease can happen to anyone at any time. We need to take action against it. It's about making all the changes you can to fight it."

In addition to her work with the American Heart Association, Annette is a member of the Michigan Organization of Nurse Executives, American Nurses Association, American Association of Critical Care Nurses, presented a poster at the National Management Congress 2013, participated in the Gathering Ministries Community Health Fair, West Bloomfield Fair 2013/2014 and is a nursing Leader on the core committee for Brightmoor Collaborative Outreach, which provides free medical care to residents on Detroit's west side. She is a registered nurse with her bachelor of science in Nursing and is expecting to receive her master of science in Administration in May.



## Annette's Story

Becoming an advocate for women's heart health may have been destiny for Annette Sciberras. The 53-year-old has dealt with heart issues — for herself and others — her entire life. Despite being a cardiac nurse who possesses detailed knowledge about heart disease, Annette let her own heart health get away from her as she got older.

Born with a congenital heart defect, Annette had open-heart surgery in 1965 to repair a faulty valve. The procedure was innovative at the time, especially for a 5-year-old. Her parents wanted her to live a normal life, so they educated themselves about heart disease and raised Annette with an active lifestyle.

As an adult, Annette's interest in health issues inspired her to become a cardiac nurse. Soon she found herself taking care of her patients and her aging parents, who both battled heart disease. But like many caregivers, Annette put her own health aside to focus on her family. And she ignored the warning signs that something might be wrong.

"In retrospect I know the signs were all there — I see patients with heart disease every day," Annette says. "But I was juggling my four children, a demanding job and my parents' declining health and I just ignored the chest pains I was having."

When her mother passed away after a heart attack and a stroke, Annette could no longer be idle about her own health. She collapsed when she saw her mother's lifeless body in the ICU bed. The diagnosis: "broken heart syndrome," a type of cardiomyopathy caused by extreme stress. Ironically, Annette's mother had been warning her in the months before that she needed to focus on her own health again.

"My mother spent her last months of life trying to convince me to take better care of myself," Annette says. "This event was a wake-up call and it made me feel closer to her than ever."

After having a stent inserted and starting recovery from the cardiomyopathy, Annette thought about what she could do to inspire others to lead a heart-healthy life.

"I wanted to help people the way my mother had helped me," she says. "I believe I am alive today because of her ongoing commitment to my health."

Annette has become an advocate for women's heart health because she feels that women are less aware of their risks. This fall, she will begin working in underserved communities in Detroit to screen people and educate them about the signs and symptoms of heart disease. Her message to female patients, family and friends: Balancing work and family obligations must be a bigger priority.

"We have to learn to manage stress and all the demands of daily life better," Annette says. "As women, we always worry about others but we must also recognize the importance of our own health."

